GUIDE TO THE NU31 SERI FILE

[The NU31 Seri file contains specific data on the Seri Indians. The Seri were located at approximately 112 N. latitude and 29 W. longitude in islands in the Gulf of California and the mainland of Sonora Mexico. The territory of the Seri has shifted considerably. When McGee visited the Seri in the 1890's they were primarily located on Tiburon Island. In 1930 Kroeber found them about equally divided between the island and the mainland. In 1952 about 80% of the Seri lived on the mainland in a settlement called Desemboque. The Seri called themselves Kunkaak or Kmike, the appellation "Seri" coming apparently from the Opata and translating as "spry." The entire area inhabited by the Seri lay within the climatic and vegetation zone of the Sonora Desert. The Seri subsisted mainly on turtles, fish, and other foods from the sea. They supplemented their diet with vegetable products which they collected, as well as game. Food was eaten raw. According to McGee, in 1780 the Seri numbered about 2,000. In 1955, Malkin counted 236, their numbers having been reduced by warfare and epidemics.

In the past the Seri were composed of from four to six subgroups who spoke different dialects of the Seri language, which is part of the Hokan Phylum (see 11: Moser for an extended discussion of these bands). The bands disappeared, however, and all sources report quite a homogeneous culture. According to Kroeber, the name Seri has been used in four different senses: 1) for the entire group of Serian speakers who composed the various bands, 2) for the inhabitants of Tiburon Island and the immediately adjacent mainland (McGee's sense), 3) for islanders associated with the missions around Hermosillo in contrast to those inhabiting Tiburon, and 4) for the modern mixture of all the Serian groups, both islanders and mainlanders (Kroeber's sense).

The line of descent of kin groups, which according to 11: Moser constitutes clans in Murdock's sense, seems to be quite a debatable point. According to McGee and 3: Davis and Dawson, these groups were clearly and definitively matrilineal. Kroeber says that his informant denied this, and Kroeber attributes the claim to the equation of primitivity and matrilineality by the Morgan school of anthropology. 11: Moser seems equally convinced that the kin groups were unequivocally patrilineal.

There are 12 sources in the Seri file, one of which is a translation from Spanish (6: Monzón). 1: McGee is a major monograph on the Seri, published in 1898. 2: Kroeber is a short ethnographic summary with a critique of McGee and Davis. 3: Davis and Dawson is a semi-popular cultural summary. The rest of the sources in the file consist of studies of more specialized subjects. 4 and 9: Malkin are studies of ethnozoology of the Seri, while 5: Dawson is on the ethnobotany. 6: Monzón is on social structure. 7: Marroquín is on problems of sanitation and disease. The author also makes recommendations for the alleviation of these problems and the integration of the Seri into Mexican culture. 8: Ascher is essentially a theoretical article on how ethnography can benefit archeology. He studied Seri harpoon shafts, inferring behavior from a quantitative analysis. 10: Davis is a report of a trip made to the Seri for the purpose of collecting items of material culture for a museum. 11: Moser is a discussion of the structure and organization of bands, which no longer existed at the time of his study. 12: Moser is a study of the methods of manufacturing "blue clay" which was used as a cosmetic, pottery paint, and as medicine. Data on "clans" will be found in both categories 614 and 618. Data on bands will be found in categories 619 and 642. The file was processed in 1961-1968.]